



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

AGENDA DATE: April 26, 2011

TO: Mayor and Councilmembers

FROM: City Clerk's Office, Administrative Services Department

SUBJECT: Recommendation To Conduct The 2011 General Municipal Election As A Vote-By-Mail Election And Authorization To Purchase Signature Verification System

RECOMMENDATION: That Council:

- A. Authorize the City Clerk to conduct the November 2011 General Municipal Election as a Vote-By-Mail (VBM) Election; and
- B. Appropriate \$12,000 from Appropriated Reserves to purchase a signature verification system.

BACKGROUND:

Because of the rising cost of a County conducted stand alone election, estimated to cost \$550,000 to \$650,000 in 2007, the City Council directed staff to conduct the City's elections. City staff have planned, organized, and implemented the last two general municipal elections.

On November 6, 2007, staff conducted the City's first stand-alone regular election as a traditional poll election. In 2007 voters filled three Councilmember seats and voted on an unsuccessful ballot measure to change the City's elections from odd to even years. The City's final election cost totaled \$280,000, with the following voter turn-out results:

2007 Traditional Poll Election		
Registered Voters	44,165	
Permanent VBM Voters	20,513	46%
Total Ballots Cast	16,364	37.05%
Poll Ballots Cast	5,474	33.5%
Mail Ballots Cast	10,890	66.5%

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With Council's approval, the 2009 election was conducted as a vote-by-mail election to fill the Mayor's and three Councilmember seats and vote on four ballot measures. The City's final election cost totaled \$240,000, with the following results:

2009 Vote-By- Mail Election		
Registered Voters	46,718	
Permanent VBM Voters	23,720	50.8%
Total Ballots Cast	23,167	49.5%

Excluding Special Statewide Elections, the 2009 vote-by-mail election voter turn-out results, at 49.5%, represent the highest voter turnout in a City election in the past three decades.

The City's vote-by-mail election included:

- Providing voters with prepaid postage envelopes to return ballots from October 5, 2009 through November 3, 2009
- The option to vote in person, on two different days at any of the City's seven designated drop-off centers:
 - Saturday preceding Election Day, October 31, 2009, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; and
 - Election Day, Tuesday, November 3, 2009, from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

DISCUSSION:

PROPOSED 2011 VOTE-BY-MAIL ELECTION

Plans for the City's 2011 General Municipal election are underway. To date staff has completed a detailed key tasks month-by-month election work plan matrix and a line-item budget.

Staff is requesting that the City Council approve a vote-by-mail election, with five drop-off centers, for the November 2011 general municipal election.

The high voter turnout, lower staffing, fewer logistical complications when compared to a poll election, and the cost savings of conducting a vote-by-mail election are reasons for the vote-by-mail recommendation.

The recommendation to establish five drop-off centers rather than seven is due to low voter turnout at two of the seven drop-off centers in the 2009 election.

Consistent with the 2009 election, voters will have the option to vote in person at any of the City's five designated drop-off centers on two different days:

- Saturday preceding Election Day, November 5, 2011, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and
- Election Day, Tuesday, November 8, 2011, from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

REQUEST FOR AUTHORIZATION TO PURCHASE A "VOTE REMOTE" AUTOMATED SIGNATURE VERIFICATION SYSTEM

Staff is recommending the purchase of the Vote Remote automated signature verification system to streamline the signature verification process.

The Vote Remote automated system performs the following tasks:

- Date/time stamps ballot envelope vs. manual process
- Stamps sequential number on ballot envelope vs. alphabetizing ballot envelope
- Scans ballot envelope bar code and updates the City's vote by mail tracking system vs. manual process
- Captures voter registration card from the voter database vs. manually typing last name and searching for voter's name in database
- Verifies signature on ballot envelope against voter registration card vs. manual process
- Creates a report of voters in which the signature did not match vs. manual process

The Vote Remote system will significantly decrease the amount of staff time required to process returned ballot envelopes, resulting in a cost savings and an earlier release of election results.

For example on Election Day, November 3, 2009, we received more than 5,000 ballot envelopes. This required twelve employees to spend 6.5 hours to process the 5,000 ballot envelopes manually, equal to 78 FTE hours.

In contrast, using a Vote Remote Electronic System the same work can be completed by four employees in two hours.

To assess the effectiveness and efficiency of this system, staff attended system demonstrations conducted at the Santa Barbara County Elections Office and the Cities of Santa Clarita and Glendale.

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To maximize a return on investment, our City proposed entering into an agreement with the City of Pasadena for a joint purchase. This approach will bring our cost from \$24,000 down to \$12,000. Since the City of Pasadena is on a different election cycle, there will be no scheduling conflicts on the use of the system.

Next Steps:

Similar to prior city managed elections, the election work plan calls for staff to return to Council in May with recommendations to approve professional services agreements related to equipment rental and election supplies, and an on-site elections consultant.

The plan also calls for staff to return to Council in mid-June requesting Council to adopt the necessary resolutions to schedule the City's general municipal election:

- Calling for the election
- If approved, authorizing a Vote-By-Mail election
- Adopting regulations pertaining to candidates' statements
- If necessary, directing the City Attorney to prepare an impartial analysis of any proposed ballot measures or Charter Amendments
- Setting priorities for filing a written argument regarding proposed ballot measures or Charter Amendments

BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

The cost of a vote-by-mail election is estimated at \$300,000. The cost of a traditional poll election is estimated at \$350,000. The Administrative Services Department Fiscal Year 2012 budget request includes \$300,000 from the General Fund for the 2011 General Municipal Election.

Staff is recommending that Council authorize the appropriation of \$12,000 from Appropriated Reserves to purchase the electronic signature verification system to streamline the verification process.

SUSTAINABILITY:

It is anticipated that a vote-by-mail election will reduce the number of potential vehicle trips made by voters and poll workers who would normally drive to the polls. This supports the City's sustainability goals to protect the environment.

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APPROVED BY: City Administrator's Office